

NEPA Terminology

The Forest Service documents decisions in different ways depending on the type of environmental analysis conducted to inform the decision.

Scoping

Scoping is an integral part of environmental analysis, and is the first step in the NEPA process. Scoping requires examining a proposed action and its possible effects; establishing the depth of environmental analysis needed; and determining analysis procedures, data needed, and task assignments. The public is encouraged to participate and submit comments on proposed projects during the scoping period, which is usually 30 days. Usually there is a date associated with the end of the scoping period—this is the date your response to the scoping statement is due. At this early stage of planning, your concerns regarding potential environmental impacts are especially valuable.

Notice of Intent (NOI)

The Forest Service will publish a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register to announce that an environmental impact statement (EIS) will be prepared. Comments on NOIs are accepted.

Categorical Exclusion (CE)

A number of categories of action have been determined from prior experience and analysis to result in no significant impact to the environment. If a proposed action falls into one of these categories, and if no extraordinary circumstances exist which might cause a significant impact in the specific case, this action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS. Unlike an EA or EIS, there is no formal pre-decision comment period with a categorical exclusion (except for scoping).

Decision Memo (DM)

When the environmental analysis has been categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, a decision memo is used to document the decision. Ordinarily, decisions documented in decision memos are not subject to appeal.

Environmental Assessment (EA)

This document discloses the environmental impacts to be expected from the proposed action and from alternatives to the proposed action. An EA is prepared when significant environmental impacts are not anticipated or when there is a question about the extent of the impacts. Comments are accepted (usually for a 30-day period following release of the EA) and considered before making a final decision. Comments are responded to in an appendix to the EA.

Decision Notice (DN)

When an EA is conducted and it is concluded that no significant environmental impact will result from implementing the selected alternative, a decision notice is issued. If a significant environmental impact will result, an environmental impact statement must be prepared. Decisions documented in a decision notice are subject to administrative appeal, unless there has been no expression of public interest in the action.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

An EIS is a formal, public document prepared to analyze the impacts on the environment of a proposed project or action. An EIS is prepared, instead of an EA, when significant environmental impacts are anticipated. EISs are released on two forms, draft (DEIS) and final (FEIS). DEISs are released for review and comment, usually 45 days but sometimes longer. Comments are considered before a final decision is made, and are responded to in the FEIS.

Record of Decision (ROD)

This type of decision is used when an EIS has been produced. Decisions documented in a ROD are subject to administrative appeal.